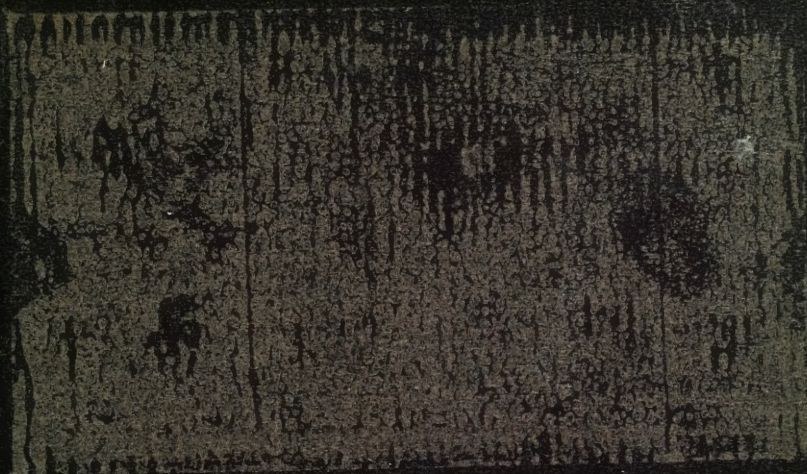






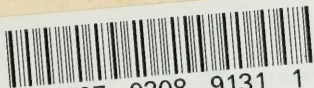
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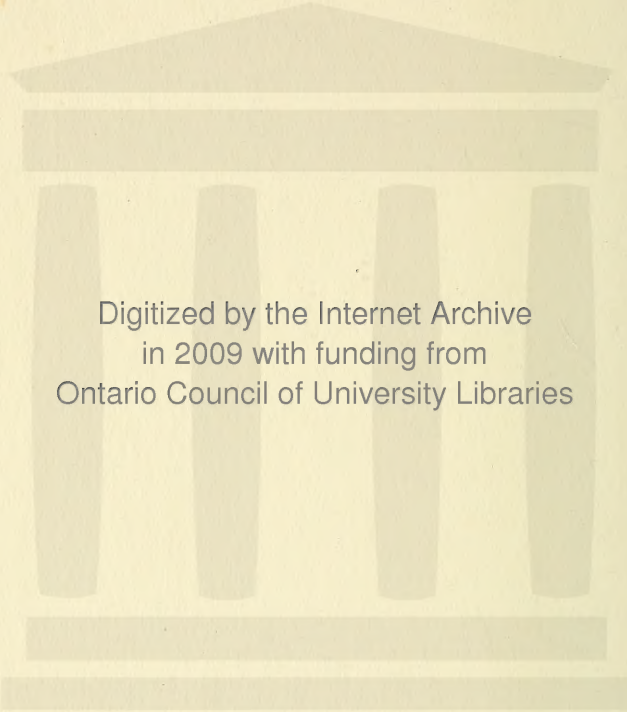
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*THE
BELOVED
STRANGER*



BOOKS BY WITTER BYNNER

AN ODE TO HARVARD

TIGER

THE LITTLE KING

THE NEW WORLD

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

GRENSTONE POEMS

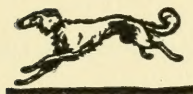
A CANTICLE OF PRAISE

THE BELOVED STRANGER

*Two Books of Song
& a Divertisement
for the Unknown Lover*

By
WITTER BYNNER

*With a Preface by
William Marion Reedy*



New York
ALFRED · A · KNOPF
1919

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INSCRIPTION

TO ROSE O'NEILL

HAVE YOU ASCENDED STAIRS
NOT TOUCHING THEM,
EASILY TURNING AND HOLDING OUT YOUR PROUD
HAND
TO BEAR WITNESS?—
WONDERING WHY YOU HAD NOT ALWAYS DONE
THIS THING,
SO SIMPLE AN ASCENT,
FLOATING OVER PEOPLE,
SMILING FOR THEM?

AND HAVE YOU CEASED AND FLOWN NO LONGER,
WAKED AGAIN,
BOUND BY THE WOUND OF YOUR CHAIN?

ASCEND WITH ME THEN,
BE WITH ME IN THESE SONGS—
HOLD OUT YOUR PROUD HAND
TO BEAR WITNESS.

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by William Marion Reedy

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PREFACE
by
WILLIAM MARION REEDY

Preface

Not in explanation of these "Songs to the Beloved Stranger" is this brief introduction written, for poetry that does not explain itself may be something else, but it is not poetry. If there be those who do not get from these lyrics something of the poet's heart and something of their own hearts and thoughts it is because those persons fail in the one thing which the reader of verse must bring to the reading in order to get anything out of it — imagination. For poetry is written to the poet that is in man, and to none other. I doubt though that these poems — or this poem — will fail of appeal to anyone competent to comprehend a presentation of beauty and of passion.

These verses are not so much narrations of incidents, descriptions of scenes, analyses of moods or emotions, as frames or forms to be clothed upon with the subjective evocations they strike from the reader. They may be said to be images or pictures, but those images or pictures are more than they obviously contain. There is that in

them, by virtue of something like chemic action among the rhythms and phrases and words, which is in effect an aura of impressions hovering over them and taking form in subjective creations by the reader. The verses may be said, in literary phrase, to be symbols searching out and bringing to experience meanings the relations of which to the actual speech are no more explainable, though no whit less actual and real, than those experiences, moods, fancies, adventures upon which our minds are set off by certain collocations of notes or tones in music. They carry an oversoul. I should say that the densest person imaginable reading this work would sense the fact that the singer is one who is translated out of space and time by the passionate experiences he undergoes and is as strange to himself as the unknown lover is to him in a world of he knows not how many more dimensions than here we know. There is an atmosphere here in which the realities are dematerialized, the persons disembodied. I think that this eerie impression is the better attained in hearing the poems well read than in reading them oneself. Here are colors, sounds, scents even, that seize upon you and waft you away to a region wherein those colors, sounds, scents, reveal their over-meaning. Where the poems are most sensuous in their quality they are so as if the passion somehow is decarnalized by its own intensity:

it becomes an incandescent, varicolored wraith hovering over its expression in the mere words. So, when, in the course of the adventure here subtly and symbolically developed, there occur accesses of disgust over disillusion and deceit, the extravagances of simile and metaphor attain a grotesqueness that is shocking and mocking. These grotesques become so much in contrast, so much out of key that they are comic, and the comicality is the very essence of ironic bitterness. It is when one comes upon these things that one is made to realize by shock the completeness with which he has been transported out of himself into a realm of otherwhereness of which the here is but a faint prefiguration. These "Songs to the Beloved Stranger" are all magic. They say more than is in the mere words. They have the characteristic of the *hokku*, the *tanka*, the *ageku*. The Chino-Japanese influence is impressed upon them even where it is not clearly visible and audible in the scenes and incidents. They are not imitations, however, but absorptions of the Eastern spirit, that spirit compelling the manner. They say more than is in the words. They present outlines of pictures which call up in the reader thoughts and feelings wherewith to fill in those outlines with the story. The mere language is not so much as are its subtle connotations with the limitless scope of fancy, suggested by its phrases, its music. It

is as if the poet sings something in part, then ceases before completing the theme, and the reader takes the key and finishes the aposeiopsis. He does this not only in particulars but in generalities. The poet, as it were, states some fact or facts, however material or spiritual, and does it in such fashion that it moves the reader intellectually or emotionally — the latter possibly more than the former — to universalize it. The method is by intensification. There is an ascetic sparseness of words. Little is directly told, but in a way to make the reader see, hear, feel, know much. The simplicity brings out spontaneous collaborative response in the reader — that reader in whom there is always a poet, else there would be no writers of poetry at all. These "Songs to the Beloved Stranger" tell a story of love, disappointment, disgust, loss, recovery of self and of the ideal that seemed to vanish, moving finally to an end in paradisaical calm. The poet's experiences displayed and developed in the moods growing out of them, unfold with clearness as the rapport of the reader is perfected by the hypnotic spell of tone and color. Their objectiveness becomes subjective in the reader, who then recreates the subjective to a new objectivity. It is in this that these poems most resemble music.

This book of verse is not a *tour de force*, even though it be so different from those other works

upon which rests Mr. Witter Bynner's already distinguished reputation. Those who appreciated "An Ode to Harvard," "The New World," "Grenstone Poems," or his plays, "Tiger," "The Little King," "Iphigenia in Tauris"—works of a wide range in subject and manner—will find here not much of the Bynner they know. In those works he is the poet, but not as now. He was more factual. In his lyrics he was a bit Browning-gerque. Somewhat didactic he was, too, and fastidious in his intellectuality. In his plays he was swift and sure, and his "Iphigenia in Tauris" pleased me, at least, for its easy, off-hand, unlabored simulation of a Greek he made no pretension of translating. All through his poems Mr. Bynner has faint traces of that which we find in this book, but they are discoverable only in the backward glance, from the coign of present knowledge.

No one thought of Witter Bynner when "Spectra" was published in 1916 or when more "spectric" poems were published later. "Spectra" was put forth as the work of Emanuel Morgan and Anne Knish; the later volume owned a third collaborator. These "spectrics" were received with a loud guffaw, as, chiefly, they deserved. Clearly they were parodies, burlesques upon the works of the imagists, H. D., Richard Aldington, John Gould Fletcher

and others. But they were something more, as I said at the time in a review of them, and as I maintained one day at luncheon at Mrs. Corinne Roosevelt Robinson's, when selections were read by no less a person than Mr. Witter Bynner himself. I held, if I remember, that they were in many respects better imagism than that they made fun of, mauger Mr. Bynner's derision of me. These burlesquers, I contended, "builded better than they knew." Two years later the secret of "Spectra" was out—Emanuel Morgan was Mr. Bynner, Anne Knish was Arthur Davison Ficke, and the third conspirator, Elijah Hay, was Marjorie Allen Seiffert. "A hoax!" shouted the critics. It was a hoax, but upon the scorers as well as the few who had found authentic poetry in the hoaxings. The hoaxers themselves were hoaxed, for some of their pseudonymous performances were better stuff than they had ever done under or over their own names. Of the trio, at least one was thoroughly subdued to that he worked in "spectrically"—Mr. Bynner has never been able to lose Emanuel Morgan. Not though he deny him, as in this verse which was omitted from the serial publication of "Songs of the Beloved Stranger" in *Reedy's Mirror*, in 1918:

Self-Portrait

I saw myself sitting at the next table,
But only in profile;
The mettle of color was there
On the cheek-bone,
And the little crape mustache,
Though not black enough,
And the lower lip
Drooping like a rope in water,
And the nose curving to ruin like the Chinese wall
With its little dark gates of old life . . .

But when the full face turned,
I knew again
That there was no such person.

That this is a picture of Witter Bynner those who know him in the flesh will not maintain, but it is a picture of some *doppelganger*; there is some such person, there on the page, whom Mr. Bynner cannot dislimn. As these poems appeared in *The Mirror* they bore the title of "Songs to the Unknown Lover." The title is now changed to "Songs of the Beloved Stranger." Is Mr. Bynner the Beloved Stranger or the Unknown Lover? He may well be both; surely, as the songs reveal, he has part in both, and both are "spectric," both speak with the voice of Emanuel Morgan and it is the voice of an authentic poet with a richer,

rarer, finer, more ethereal tone than anything we find in the earlier work of Witter Bynner. Here is something more than a pose. It is the voice of a singer with a clearer vision and a more moving rhythm than anything in Bynner before. Here the poet is more the master of the mystery of sound in the intensification or the subtler shading of sense. He is a better colorist too, and with a cleaner etching line, and with more delicate arrangement in values. Mr. Bynner wrote these poems as Emanuel Morgan, and would have published them under that name but for editorial purposes of mystification. They are more Morgan than Bynner. They are the songs of one who says "there was no such person" as himself, but the reader of them will know that the beautiful Chinese pictures here shown are not the offgivings of a non-existent intelligence.

Mr. Bynner would seem to be possessed by a personality he conjured from his subliminal self — it is as if a medium were lost in his or her mysterious "control." His case is strikingly similar to that of William Sharp who invented or discovered within himself that Fiona McLeod, whose forthpourings so inestimably surpassed in beauty and in emotional content anything that Sharp ever did as himself. Bynner is not so irretrievably swamped as a poet by Emanuel Morgan, as was Sharp by Fiona McLeod. There remains some

Bynner — a good deal in fact, unless it be that there always was much Emanuel Morgan in the earlier work of Bynner. We shall have to leave all this to the psychiatrists, but not, I hope, to the psychoanalysts, one of whom has discovered the “incest motive” in “Hiawatha!”

Mr. Bynner went to the Orient with Mr. Ficke in 1916. In this book we have the singing evidence of what Emanuel Morgan saw there — evidence in color, in sound, in scent — the wind-blown bells on temples, odors of wistaria, the statues of jade. The poet “holds the gorgeous East in fee” but passes it on to us in miniatures, or in little carvings of exquisite delicacy. By innumerable touches of artistry, seldom in broad strokes or splashes, the poet builds up his scene and elicits from it an emanation or glamour which is exactly the atmosphere in which a Beloved Stranger and an Unknown Lover — both, as I take it, denied by their summoner — may have their being. It is being of a kind, though warmer and more vivid, with that of those persons, like figures half awakened into life from dim tapestries erstwhile seen in since violated Belgium, who play their parts in the opalescent smoky dream dramas of Maeterlinck.

Here, then, is a mystery of poetry not only but of personality, whether they are songs of or to a Beloved Stranger or an Unknown Lover. It

is a work, perhaps esoteric, certainly exotic. But however you may explain it, it is a work which makes the reader sound curious deeps of his unsuspected self in response to the play upon him of the poet's curiously evocative art.

WILLIAM MARION REEDY.

*THE
BELOVED STRANGER*

Book I

“You come with the light . . .”

Veils

This veil
Of lavender and dawn
Floats off
Invisible,
And this of purple noon
Unwinds in wisdom,
And this of evening
Titters, undulates,
Dips, darts,
And this of night
Circles around me singing
To the very edge and presence of the young
 moon —
And it brushes the tip
Like lips
Three times.

The Wave

You come with the light on your face
Of the turn of a river from trees to the open sun,
You are the wandering spirit of the most beloved place —

And yet you are a joy not there begun
Nor anywhere, but always about to be,
The invisible succeeding crest
That follows from the open sea
And shall be loveliest.

I have no language, hardly any word
To name you with, I have no flight of hands
To swim your surface closer than a bird:
For endless changing countermands
Your face and blinds me blacker than a crest of
sun,

O joy not yet begun
But only about to be,
O sweet invisible unceasing wave
Following me, following me
Through the sea-like grave!

The Voice

When the dream of your voice draws near,
O my stranger,
I am birds, you the wind,
I clouds, you the sun,
I the bell, you the tongue.

At the sound of your voice
There is neither dawn nor night,
Weeping nor the peace of death,
But only your voice
And I replying
And you not answering,
A part of my soul passing and I not finding it —
Though I open the door and stare out
When the dream of your voice draws near,
O my stranger !

The Stranger

Approaching ever on a winged horse
Like yours
And bringing me a living star,
Like this they have all come to me
And have all left me,
All but the beloved stranger.

And it is you this time
Who are the beloved stranger,
And I would have you lean near to me,
Before you leave me,
As the others have all left me,
All but the beloved stranger
Who will never leave me,
Approaching ever
On a winged horse,
Like yours,
Bringing me a living star —
Like this.

Dream

I had returned from dreaming —
When there came the look of you
And I could not tell after that,
And the sound of you
And I could not tell,
And at last the touch of you
And I could tell then less than ever,
Though I silvered and fell
As at the very mountain-brim
Of dream.

For how could the motion of a shadow in a field
Be a person?
Or the flash of an oriole-wing
Be a smile?
Or the turn of a leaf on a stream
Be a hand?
Or a bright breath of sun
Be lips?

I can reach out and out — and nothing will be
there . . .
None of these things are true.
All of them are dreams,
There are neither streams
Nor leaves nor orioles nor you.

Roofs

I don't know what it is
That sets me flying
Over the roofs this morning
Swift on tiptoe,
Touching the chimneys and railings.
Not even the middle of roofs,
Only the edges.

I don't know why it is
So many dancers
Dance in my dawn,
Hailing this hard city,
For most of the dancers that lead me
Point in directions daily
Of mountain and of sea,
Toward little villages
And houses nestling,
Rivers,
Hills.

I don't know what it is
That sets me flying
Over the roofs this early morning
Swift on tiptoe . . .

You!

Wonder

Is it body?

Is it spirit?

Is it I?

Is it you?

Is it the beloved strangeness

Of a god?

The Wall

How is it,
That you, whom I can never know,
My beloved,
Are a wall between me and those I have known
 well —
So that my familiars vanish
Farther than the blue roofs of Nankow
And are lost among the desert hills?

Magic

And when I speak to you of common things
You receive them for a moment
With candor and with level eyes,
Acknowledging their right to be. . . .

And then always you dismiss them,
Replacing them with the long, true splendors
Of a steely fish cutting through rings of steel,
And you run your fingers across a mountain-side
Strung like a lyre with thin waters,
And you sheath the blade of your body
In a scabbard of sea.

And the rock,
On which my hand is,
Becomes a firmament
And my head the moon
And my feet
The people of the earth
Who speak to us of common things.

Lightning

There is a solitude in seeing you,
Followed by your company when you are gone.
You are like heaven's veins of lightning.
I cannot see till afterward
How beautiful you are.
There is a blindness in seeing you,
Followed by the sight of you when you are gone.

Wings

At the first footfall of an uncouth season
You migrate with a sudden wing-sweep
To beauty.

With you there is no meantime,
You are now,
You are the island
Where cherries always blossom,
The nightingale's
Twenty-four hours of song,
You are the unbroken column by the sea.

Cherry-Blossoms

A child,
Looking at you, a cherry-bough,
And at me, a river,
Saw you and you, two cherry-boughs,
And laughed. . . .

For run as fast as ever I may,
My heart
Moves only with you,
Only with your blossoms,
Remembering them
Or awaiting them,
Moving when you move in the wind
And still when you are still.

Hemispheres

Only by remembering you,
O east of my west,
Can I make my lovers real to me,
And only by forgetting you
Can I find my truest solitude
Strange and unknown to me.

Horses

Words are hoops
Through which to leap upon meanings,
Which are horses' backs,
Bare, moving.

The Wind

How long must the wind go round in a mill
And the meaning be drawn?

How long before it shall climb a tree again
And shake down shivering silver?

The Blue-jay

I who look up at you
Am a blue-jay
Crested,
And my only way
Of saying to you,
My sky,
That I have wings of your color
Is —
Clang!

Tree-toads

I went as far from myself as ever I could,
To think of you. . . .

I listened in the night
To the little fluting toads
Safe from their own images,
And I heard them sighing
With a silver sigh
For beauty.

The Valley

Only I and the sunset
In the snow-valley of your breast
And the slow shadows of the motion of breath,
Only I and moonrise in the valley of your breast
And the dark of sleep . . .

Until lilies in the valley have opened,
And I am awake with petals
And with the birds of your voice.

Nakedness

Brightness of earth for the hollow of your throat
They brought to you,
And blossoms of death for you to throw away
And many things like links of chains,
To you whose wings are nakedness.

But I have given your nakedness the gift of mine,
And whosoever brings, from this day forth,
Obeisances
To the hollow of your bosom,
Shall find between those hills of sun,
Beloved,
My shadow. . . .

Darkness

Leaping from that other darkness
Come two circles of flame —
When the pressure of your lips
Made of my eyes
Two suns
Embracing the world with light . . .
It was a darkness
As rich with strong wonder
As the depths of the sea,
And you were upon me
Like great sea-gardens
And great waves . . .

What shall I care, not seeing you now in the
dark? —

For you have fulfilled all darkness
With light,
To which I need not even open my eyes.

Fear

This day has come,
Like an idiot, blank and dumb,
Over a lonely road
Under lonely skies.
And though at first I whistled and strode
Like a strong man showing no fear,
Yet I am afraid, afraid of this day,
You not being here,
And I look back and back at this uncouth day,
You not being here,
And my heart is in my mouth because of its eyes,
In which nothing is clear.

A Sigh

Still must I tamely
Talk sense with these others?

How long
Before I shall be with you again,
Magnificently saying nothing!

Singing

What is this singing I hear
Of the sun behind clouds?

It is not long before you shall come to me,
Beloved.

And that is the singing I lean to hear
In my side,
Where your bird is.

Summons

Sail into my sight,
Till the sunlight gathers only upon you
And the blues of the water
Encircle you.

Though you have sailed no farther from me
Than a quiet bay
Beyond a point of cedars,
Yet you have been as far away
As death.

Mist

Between a high shadow of hay and of hills
And the deep glen mothering the sound of its
waters,

I climb up into the dark —

Then slowly back again,

Because it is so far to you.

And I lean against the misty fence of the morn-
ing . . .

Till suddenly

The mist goes smouldering down the world

Before the stream

Of dawn,

Like mice

Pefore wings.

Climbing

The mist on the mountain is gone now. . . .

I have climbed many roads to see the mountain.

I have ventured many people to see you,
Peak of golden sun,
Beloved face.

Crystal

Between your laughter and mine
Lies the shadow of the sword of change.

Yours is innocent.
Mine knows

You had sat abstracted
By the touch of dreaming strings
Of an old guitar —
When in the centre of the room
A crystal dish cracked for no reason.

Then you darted with joy to the fragments,
Like a fish to a crumb,
And held between your thumbs and your fingers
Two pieces of laughter.

Dusk

Dusk came over the hill to me,
Holding a red moon,
And I danced with her,
Feeling and following her starry steps,
Till she turned and gave the moon
To the swarthy night —
And slipped away without explaining.

The Boatmen

A nearing benison of boatmen singing . . .
Can they be bringing to me a new wonder?

They are waiting in the night, as for a passen-
ger . . .
But who would embark now with no light at all?

The dark is shaking like a tambourine . . .
They are taking my old wonder.

The Cataract

Over the edge of the days
My wonder has fallen
To be scattered and lost away,
Down from the temples of my love of you . . .

From the temples of blue jade
The downward flight of all the Chinese angels
Diving together,
With their white phoenixes attendant,
Plumes, arms, voices intertwirling,
All heaven falling,
Green with the touch of earth
Grievous with laughter,
Embracing, thrown apart,
And then, below,
Inwound for the upward flight again,
The crested flight,
To the temples of white jade . . .

To the changing temples of my love of you.

Autumn

Last year, and other years,
When autumn was a vision of old friendships,
Of friends gone many ways,
I stood alone upon a bank of coppered fern,
I breathed my height of isolation,
Encircled by a remembering countryside.
I touched dead fingers in a larch . . .
I sailed on long blue waves of land
Flowing transfixed the whole horizon round . . .
I wore the old imperial robes
Of aster, sumac, golden-rod . . .
I flaunted my banners of maple . . .
And, when the sun went down,
I lay full length
Upon a scarlet death-bed.
So kingly a thing was autumn,
Other years.

But here you stand beside me on this hill,
And shake your head and smile your smile
And twist these things lightly between your fingers
As a pinch of dust —
And bare your throat
And show me only spring,
Spring, spring,
Fluttering like your slender side,
Cascading like your hair.

Weariness

There is a dear weariness of love . . .
Hand relaxed in hand,
Shoulder at rest upon shoulder.

And to me that pool of weariness is more wonderful
Than crater, cataract,
Maelstrom, earthquake . . .

For it is a double pool
In which lie, silent,
The golden fishes of sleep.

The Hour

I was glad of the night that hid my face . . .

For your hand touching me
Was the stroke of an hour
In sickness,
Was the fire of ice.

Lament

There is a chill deeper than that of death,
In the return of the beloved and not of love.
And there is no warmth for it
But the warmth of a world which needs more than
the sun —
Or the warmth of lament for beauty,
Which is graven on many stones.

And yet I would be with you a little while,
Dear ghost.
I will endure even the marsh-mist on my throat
And the fingers of the moon.

The Skeleton

I keep my closet neat now,
The skeleton well covered.

But when you even walk by the locked door,
The breezes of your look
Stir what hangs inside —
And I wonder what you are hearing
When those knee-bones knock together.

The Crow

And it is you
For whom the sun and all the stars
Made but a starveling's crown,
So azure was your presence
And so beamed with light.
You were the earth in which I would have laid
 me down,
The sea in which I would have drowned.
But the earth is dead now
And the sea cold,
And the sun and all the stars now
Are changed —
Leaving your head dishonored and uncrowned . . .
The sun is an ache on my own temples now
And the moon an icy cap, my cap,
The cap of a fool,
And I shake the stars for bells.

The Moon

Red leaped
The moon,
From behind the black hill of night . . .
And soon it was silver forever
And there was no change . . .

Until its time came . . .

And its setting was as white as a corpse,
Among the flowers of dawn.

An End

As though it mattered,
As though anything mattered —
Even laughter!

For in the end there shall be no one to tell
Whether it was laughter
Or weeping.

Divertisement

"I change my ceremony . . ."

I Change

*I wonder how it happens
I was made
A foe of agate
And a friend of jade,*

*Yet have become,
Unwisely I'm afraid,
The friend of agate
And the foe of jade —*

*So that I wish, by dying,
To be made
Careless of agate,
Careless of jade.*

I Remember

*There was an hour
When we could love and laugh . . .*

*And after that hour we went like revellers in madness
And the touch of the pavement was a kiss
And the street-corners were embraces,
And the height of cities was our height over people
And the height of stars our height over cities
And the height of heaven our height over stars,
And the height of God's throne would have been our
 height over heaven,
But for our mirth,
Which shook vertically through heaven
And unashamed.*

I Drift

*Shod in little winds,
Or leaves, or snow,
My feet shall drift across the moonlight . . .*

*How plumed they were with direction
In those other days
How winged with mirth! —*

*But now they shall drift
And be still.*

I Gamble

I threw the dice with Death,

I won.

Again I won.

Death only smiled . . .

But so did the deep-bosomed toad,

And the birch

Winked its pencilled eyes.

I Leer

*If I might be tall negroes in procession,
Carrying each of them a rib of you,
And a cannibal-king bearing your collar-bones,
One in my right hand, one in my left,
And touching my forehead with them at slow intervals,
Might I not be too comforted
To weep?*

*If my love had only consumed you,
Not left you unconsumed,
Might not the moon have silvered me with content,
Oiled me like the long edges of palms?*

I Compute

*I am a miser of my memories of you
And will not spend them.
When they were anticipations
I spent them
And bought you with them,
But now I have exchanged you for memories,
And I will only pour them from one hand into the other
And back again,
Listening to their
Clink,
Till someone comes
Worth using them
To buy . . .
Then I will change them again into anticipations.*

I Stab

*Love embalms the moments,
Art stabs the years.
Love is the careful undertaker.
Art is the beloved assassin. . . .
Let me wear a black glove then —
With a knife in it!*

I Listen

*I hear a robin chuckling —
I change my ceremony.*

*From my hearse of winter,
From my coffin of you,
I start up and wave my hand.*

*For who has returned,
Curtseying in the shape of a tree,
But spring!*

I Leap

*I loved you
And you are gone.*

*And since there is so much landscape,
Why then should I care,
Having loved you,
That you are gone?*

*Shall I,
Who have been like a mountain-top,
Crawl prostrate to the sea? —
Or leap like a cliff?*

I Hope

*I must throw out my net for the silver sides
Of fish like the brows of Chinese brides
Or the round and red-eyed fish of woe
Slipped from the waves of the after-glow
Or for one small airy, watery flier
With a fin of cloud and a wing of fire! —
I must throw out my net — though I only bring in
Weeds and weazened terrapin . . .*

I Evade

The look in your eyes

Was as soft as the underside of soap in a soap-dish . . .

And I left before you could love me.

I Find

*The darkness of your face,
That darkness as of olive-trees,
That darkness of warm earth,
Once gave the whiteness of the Parthenon
Its living beauty . . .*

*Your face a wine-cup
For the blood of grapes,
Your smiles bright-weaving shadows of the vine,
Make me a wreath of them,
Give me a cup in the sunlight
Of the blood of grapes!*

I Wonder

*In my desert of familiars
Time rocked like a camel under me,
Ungainly, heaving minutes,
Shaggy hours,
Four feet gathering into a season,
Trailing into years . . .*

*O sullen-swaying ship,
Is this difference the shadow of palm-trees? —
Or only the shifting of my familiars,
The sands?*

I Drink

*Wine is a worship . . .
Blue peas
Are set in rows
In pods of lapis lazuli
When gods eat,
And though oysters
Are white as dawn and singing
From the sea —
The hearts of humming-birds
Are black as a storm
In summer.*

I Kill

I stood between you and the hills . . .

*Sorrowful hunter that I was,
The wings of your mouth ceased flying
Because I killed them with a kiss.*

*And the rest of your wings flew away
Into the sunset.*

I Accuse

*You have words
But nothing hangs on them.
They gleam
On the moulding of your mouth
Like empty picture-hooks.*

*Even when you say you love me,
There's but a frame —
With neither me in it
Nor yourself.*

I Urge

*Out of the woods you peer,
And your eyes
Are like the desolate moon
Thawing.*

*And there are leaves in your hand,
Not withered.*

*And there are words in your heart,
Never used . . .*

*Bring me your words, your leaves, your eyes,
Beloved stranger,
We have outlived the moon . . .*

I Answer

*When you are asking, by these lips that touch,
Whether death is nothing or is much,*

*I am but answering your waves of hair,
"Beloved, O beloved, who shall care!"*

I Laugh

*Now when embers whisper
And mice cry in the wall
And a chair in the dark crosses its legs —
I am thinking of one
Of whom I shall not be thinking some later night
When embers exclaim
And mice laugh in the wall
And the chair in the dark uncrosses its legs.*

I Sigh

*You passed as quick and unknown
As the shadow of wings
On sun-closed lids
By the sea.*

I Forget

*The manifold
Red metal of your hair, vibrant like a bell,
Made, when you moved, a delicate old din
As of Spanish gold
Brought shining with a deep-sea spell
From where dead men have been,*

*And to see one glint of the crystalline
Blue magic of your eyes
Was to be lighter than with the first
Breath of bluebells after the worst
Of winters — was to lean
Upon the skies.*

*But when your spring shall have ending
And your gold be done spending,
The metal in the earth of you shall go its way
And in some other heart than mine a bluebell sway.*

I Exclaim

*How can you like it, women! —
To be the solemn quips of bright despair,
Angels in a graveyard,
Monuments of mist on a grass-blade
Tears of the laughing moment,
Smiles of unsmiling time!*

I Look

*I have left you behind,
You lovers talking poetry,
You poets talking love,
And as I look back at the yellow windows
Of your dark little house,
Smoke, going up from your chimney,
Smiles into the night,
Circles into a halo,
Between the noise of two cats
And the quiet of the north star.*

I Enter

*Into the night comes the blind man again,
Seeing a god with his feet,
And smiling with his cane
At what we think we see.*

*He climbs an infinite pagoda,
Each hour a new roof
Tinkling to his touch.
He breathes incense,
And a star is set in each palm
And in his heart a vase
For dew.*

I Swim

*Beyond the fluctuating pulse of flesh,
Its agile and interminable change,
I am enamored of the rocks and sun,
Their bodily firm warmth, their passionate calm . . .
If woman I must have, give me the sea,
Colder and stronger, closer, more suave
Than women, her wave winding on my breast
For the embrace, the shock, the ecstasy.
Her white-veined arm of foam upraised in air
To throw me back upon the beach of sleep.*

I Lean

*Close to the moving sands,
I lean upon the desirable dead,
Twining their fingers with mine,
The dead
Who are eased
Of their love.*

*But the waves come in —
Alive.*

I Vanish

Inrushing
Life,
Life,
Life,
Outrushing again,
And all in touch —
Even this little moment
Thrown bubbling,
Iridescent,
Gone.

Book II

“Like an arrow you come . . .”

The Canyon

It is the dead sex of the earth
On which the sun still gazes.

It is all the mountains of love,
Into whose sarcophagus
Peers
The moon.

Birds

I should not find the pain so hard to bear,
Of lying bound upon the world,
If only daily there were birds, like yours, Prometheus,
To tear from me
This unquenched heart.

Ruins

O, to be back in heaven,
Beyond hope,
Beyond the mountain-circled and forgotten dead,
Beyond the curling waves of buried stone!

Can I who have seen heaven decaying
Become enzealed for the earth,
Whose ruins cannot be
So vast and beautiful
As the ruins of heaven!

The Arrow

Now like an arrow you come, sped by an angel,
Tipped with the spirit of wings and pointed with
pain —

Only from heaven could fall the dart of your presence

Blinding as the lightning, blown as summer rain.

Herald of heaven you are and the dancing height
of wonder,

Visible soul of singing, moving breath of
breath . . .

The dancers of the earth aspire to be winged always.

But you are the dancer of heaven, yearning for
death.

How I ache to ease you, reaching with my fingers,
Straining with my heart, through the empty air!
I would take your beauty into my hands and
break it

And stand before you breathless and be the perfect
slayer.

Must you still in heaven dance with all the angels
And weary of them, leave them and wander down
the sky,

Living, living, living, living, living, living,
Yearning and dancing, and no way to die?

The Dust

Where you go I follow you,
Rather I run before,
And here I am when you return,
Waiting by your door . . .
I am the dust upon your face,
The wind that worries you,
I am your beggar and your hound,
Your leaf of grass, your shoe.

Cactus

They flush with their love and fill their breasts
with it

And say short words, not knowing what they say,
Their meetings have contents and covers,
Jewels and lids. . . .

They can count their love.

How different, O beloved stranger,
Have our meetings been,
When I may not say my love! —
Meetings of mountain and desert,
Open to the wind,
With snow far-off, like a cry,
And on edges of cactus
Red drops
Of the blood of silence.

A Ghost

You leaned against me,
Humming a slow song
Of purple shadows . . .
Showers and javelins and shooting-stars
Fell through me where you leaned . . .

Whose ghost was I?

Touch

Someone was there . . .

I put out my hand in the dark
And felt
The long hair
Of the wind.

No Ease

I will not think of you too much,
Lest I become as a king of olden hell,
Surrounded by a ring of flame.

And it is a trouble to you,
And no ease to me.

For if I thought of you too much,
I should fall through space
And there would be no world for me at all.

And I can still go about the world
As patient as a beggar with one arm,
As valiant as a crab with one quick claw —
If I do not think of you too much.

Laurel

I will not call you beautiful again,
Though my throat ache with the silence of refrain-
ing,
And not a sigh will I explain,
Though my hands fill with explaining . . .

For you are as beautiful as a hill I know
In spring, breathing with light —
But as soon as I told you, a chill like snow
Covered and turned you white.

I will not call you beautiful again,
Your labyrinthine loveliness I will not name.
I will be silent as forgotten men
Dead beyond blame.

No matter how your airs of spring beguile,
Be it my fortitude, my business, my endeavor,
Not to acclaim the laurel of your smile —
Except to-day, to-morrow and forever!

Snows

Which is it now,
You who lived once by the chill height?
Is this whiteness of yours
Snow of the winter
Hard-shining in the sun,
Or snows returning two months after snow,
Snows of narcissus,
Drifting over you —
O coldest, sweetest body?

Certainty

Does it mean nothing to you that I love you? . . .
It would mean as little were I Michael Angelo.
You would put out your dancing fingers,
Those quick hands,
And say, "*No, do not love me.*"

But that is what I love,
Your certainty —
Of which on all the earth
'There is very little.

Gates

I had answered them,
“ *But I am left with no desire,
For I have known a happiness
Whose memory is all my need.*”

The camel lounges through another gate.

You answer now,
“ *But I am left with no desire,
For I have known a happiness
Whose memory is all my need.*”

The Jewel

O I have been in a far land
And seen a lofty gate
And a camel-train sway toward the sand
With chrysoprase for freight —
And seen a lady with a ring
That led me like an eye,
And whichever way her hand would swing,
That way swung I.
I followed like a poppy-fool,
Calling where she went,
“ *O take my soul and make it cool,
Unwind my cerement!* ”—
And still the coal-black jewel swung
Before me, left and right,
Like a chant the sea had sung
On a windy night.
Like dust behind her camel’s hoof,
I followed in the road
To the golden-rippling roof
Of her august abode.
She turned to see whom her ring had led
And turned away again
Into a palace carven red
With dead desires of men.

The passion in my feet was spent.
I stood before a wall
As wide as the firmament,
As final and as tall.

Pain

Yes, life has curious ways, and I to you
Am little more than anyone might be.
But I cannot lose you any more, my love.

I cannot see you any more, my love,
For if I do not see you I have eyes
But if I see you I have none at all.

I cannot love you any more, my love,
For if I do not love you I have peace
But if I love you I have none at all.

It was a cruel thing when you were born,
For I had always pain of missing you
But finding you at last, that was the pain.

Opium

Like an opium-lover,
I banish you,
All thought of you.
But wherever I send you,
Your two arms entwine me,
Drawing me there with you
Into exile.

The Fire-Mountain

Forget you? —

Can that Hawaiian volcano

Forget its quick fountains and cascades

Of fire?

Flame

Is it your fault
That winds from heaven sweep through me and
 I call it you?
Is it your fault
That the chin and throat of you are the curve
Of a mountain-brook where I would drink,
That your whole body is a heap of stinging sweet-
 ness from the pines,
That when you sleep your silence is an arch of the
 moon, your motion thunder of the moon,
And when you wake your eyes are the long path
 of ocean to a new burning,
To a nest of phoenixes
Whose golden wings
Are tipped with flame?
Is it your fault
That phoenixes arise from fire —
And dragons?

Fire

In the interval you answered me
Like a fire :

" But these hands "

(They were stretched toward me)

*" Are for the hands of another,
These lips "*

(They were curved and strange)

" Are for the lips of another,

*And there is someone for whom these eyes
Can gleam*

As they never can for you."

So answering me,

You let your bright thigh touch me

And my throat rest across yours

And your breast heave with mine,

While your face crouched afar from me
like an escaping slave

And your hands fell fainting . . .

And into me, even now as I hold you,

Roll all the waste spaces of the world,

Desert after desert.

The Dead

Since you bequeath your living face
And leave your throat for me to lean my eyes
 against,
As though the one I loved the uttermost had died
And willed me all her golden benefits,
Am I not happy then? . . .

O largesse of the dead!
O vaulted throat!

Candles

Your eyes are not eyes —
They never laugh.

Your arms and ankles laugh,
Your lips twinkle incessantly,
Your cheek is bland with mirth,
Your winged ear flashes backward —
But your eyes never laugh.

You do your best to arrange differently:
You heap your eyes round with playthings,
You tell them rippling ribaldries,
You dress them harlequin and clown
And send them skipping —
But they never laugh.

Many people, impelled by the bright altar of
 your face,
Come into the temple,
Now knowing that they cannot see your eyes
 at all,
Nor you theirs.
And they worship familiarly;
While I, looking close, am afraid,

For I see only a niche and candles :
A circle of hard flames
Around an unknown god.

Peace

When I am crucified upon his brow,
Will the strange god be at peace?

The Bell

Beloved stranger,
You who were a god
With a temple,
Where are you now
Among these dragon-tiles,
Among these broken walls?
Are you too become dust?
Or do you hear the solitary bell
Beside the single arch still standing
Of the gateway which once led to you?

Do you hear the wind
Which moves me to these whispers,
You who were a god?
Do you hear the sand
Drifting in your temple?
Do you hear me, me, me —
The solitary bell
Beside the single arch still standing
Of the gateway which once led to you?

The Cup

Shall the wound of the world be my wound,
That I cannot shake off the cold hands of clay?

I have seen a golden-white face, young and close
to mine,

Dear and unknown, waken and vanish away,
I have seen the most deeply-known of all faces
deepen and vanish away,

I have distilled from the sun
And from the cool of evenings and of dawns
And from the beauty of all my strangers, one by
one,

My potion. I have drunk my fill . . .

O let me lift the cup to you, strange god, to say
That I have no more will

To shake off now the moon-cold hands of clay.
I drain the cup to you, white stranger, who arrive
Silent — silent with the wound of the world, my
wound.

The God

Burn my body,
Disperse me in many beds,
That at last none may follow
Into my wide solitude
But the strange god . . .
The beloved.

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